

No. 7.

Price, Five Cents.

SHIELD WEEKLY

TRUE DETECTIVE STORIES • STRANGER THAN FICTION

UNDER SEAL or The Hand of the Guilty

BY ALDEN F. BRADSHAW



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NEW YORK, January 19, 1901.

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Under Seal;

OR,

THE HAND OF THE GUILTY.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

CHAPTER I.

A MYSTERIOUS ROBBERY.

Chief Inspector Watts turned from the telephone occupying a convenient position upon his desk, and glancing toward the passage making through his stenographer's room to the general clerk's office, called sharply:

"Let me know if Sheridan Keene is about here."

"He is," responded Garratt, from his desk outside.

"Send him in here, please."

The young detective was not long in responding to the chief's summons. Presently a knock upon the door of the latter's private office prefaced his entrance, and the lithe, erect figure of one of the cleverest detec-

tives under the efficient direction of the famous Boston inspector came over the threshold.

"Leave the door open, Keene!" said Chief Watts, looking up when the detective entered. "I expect a gentleman to call here presently."

"Do you wish me to remain here?"

"Yes, I think so," was the reply. "Sit down over here. I have just received a communication from Mr. Markham, one of the local managers of the Adams Express Company, and he now is on his way up here."

"What is wrong down there, chief?" asked Sheridan Keene, taking the seat to the left of the chief's high desk, and laying aside his hat.

"A rather mysterious robbery, as nearly as

I could get it over the wire," said Chief Watts, at the same time busily glancing over his voluminous mail of that morning.

"A mysterious robbery?" echoed Keene, in some surprise; for the precautions of this great express company against anything of the nature of a theft are so efficient that a loss is indeed a rare occurrence. "Did Mr. Markham give you any of the particulars, Chief Watts?"

"Not of consequence," was the reply. "I understood that part of the contents of an express package has been stolen. Markham is now coming up here to state the case in detail. I may decide to have you look into it, and you had better hear his statement. Ah, here he is now! Good-morning, Mr. Markham."

The gentleman who had entered while Chief Watts was speaking was a portly man in middle life, with that type of countenance indicating both force and ability. He threw open his top-coat as he entered, bowing affably, and at once took the chair to which the Chief Inspector courteously signed him with a wave of his hand.

"Good-morning, Chief Watts," he rejoined; "do I find you very busy?"

"I am always busy, Markham; but never too busy to accept an additional duty for the protection of life and property," laughed the chief, yet his observations were eminently true. "I presume you are acquainted with Detective Sheridan Keene?"

"I know him very well by name," replied Markham, bowing agreeably, and flashing a quick glance at the young detective. "Glad to meet you personally, Mr. Keene."

Sheridan Keene merely bowed, in his gravely observant way.

"Now, Mr. Markham, what's the trouble down at the Adams Express Company's office?" inquired the chief, pushing aside his mail and swinging around in his chair.

Markham forcibly drew either side of his heavy coat higher on his broad chest, and gave his head an emphatic shake.

"There may be no trouble at our office," he replied, with vigorous significance. "As a matter of personal opinion, I am not inclined to think there is. But an incident has occurred which is utterly inexplicable. It completely baffles us. It is one of the most mysterious robberies of which I have heard."

"You interest me, to say the least," smiled Chief Watts. "When was this robbery discovered?"

"About a week ago."

"Why did you not call upon me earlier?"

"Because, Chief Watts, the case is so very peculiar that we could not bring ourselves to believe that it was one of robbery, and we have been personally investigating it, in the hope of clearing it up without official assistance. But we are now knocked out completely, and throw up the sponge."

"And are willing to be gracefully led to your corner," commented Chief Watts, laughing genially. "But, levity aside, Markham, what are the precise facts of the case?"

"I will state them briefly, chief, and as nearly as possible in the order of their occurrence."

"Do so, please."

The portly express manager drew a notebook from an inner pocket of his coat, and, with frequent references thereto, made the following extraordinary statements.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT BECAME OF THE MONEY?

"The parties first involved in this affair," began Markham, "are the firm of Horton & Hague, of this city."

"The dry-goods merchants?"

"Yes, sir. On the 5th of this month, a week ago yesterday, Mr. Hague, the junior member of the firm, called at the Mutual

National Bank, where they carry a deposit, and drew a check for twelve thousand dollars against their account. That part of the transaction was all right."

"Go on, sir."

"The bank cashier, Mr. Evans, gave Hague the money in notes of large denomination; namely, nine one-thousand dollar bills, and six notes of five hundred dollars each."

"Which makes up the twelve thousand dollars," bowed Chief Watts; "I understand."

"Hague received and counted this money," continued Markham; "then handed it to one of the bank clerks, who was with Cashier Evans in the enclosure, and asked him to put it under seal in an envelope and address the package to the senior member of the firm, who was in New York."

"Note the address, Keene, if you please."

Sheridan Keene drew a block of paper under his hand, and took up a pencil.

"Now, Mr. Markham."

The clerk addressed one of the bank's document envelopes, as requested, to R. J. Horton, in care of Steinfort Brothers, No. — Broadway, New York. The money, in the meantime, was lying on the counter directly in front of the clerk, and in plain sight of Mr. Hague. Cashier Evans had returned to his private office."

"Go on," nodded the Chief; "I follow you."

The clerk, whose name is Dean, took up the notes, and before putting them in the envelope again passed them out of the window to Hague, asking him if he would like to verify the amount once more before they were put under seal. Hague again counted the money, and states that Dean then put it in the envelope as requested, and sealed the flap with wax, stamping with the bank seal seven impressions across the back of the envelope."

"Note all of these details in their order," suggested Chief Watts, to Sheridan Keene.

"I am doing so," was the reply.

"The package having been sealed," continued Markham, "Hague leaned nearer the window, and requested Dean to mark the value of the package five thousand instead of twelve thousand."

"Why did he make such a request as that?" demanded Chief Watts, frowning slightly.

"For the purpose of cheating the Adams Express Company," was the censorious reply. "He wished to send the package by express to New York. Our carrying charges increase with the amount forwarded, and Hague had calculated that he could reduce the express charges a few paltry dollars by deceiving us as to the sum the package contained."

"One moment, please! Does Hague say why he sent the funds by express, rather than by a draft on the New York bank?"

"Yes, he does."

"What are his reasons?"

"He states that Horton was in New York buying goods, in payment for which he wanted cash. Owing to the stringency in the New York money market just then, and the fact that Horton could be spared the trouble of getting a large check converted, Hague decided to send him the funds in cash. And in order to beat the Adams Express Company out of a little more than half its charges, he requested the clerk to mark the package five thousand dollars."

"Very brilliant on his part," commented Chief Watts, dryly. "What action did the bank clerk take?"

"Dean demurred somewhat over the curious request, but Hague assured him that there was nothing very great involved in the matter, and Dean finally complied with the request, and marked the package seven thousand dollars short."

"What then?"

"Hague then requested that the package should be sent by one of the bank messengers

to the office of the Adams Express Company, which was also done. The way being in his direction, Hague accompanied the messenger, and together they presented the package at the proper counter in our office."

"Yes; go on."

"Our clerk carefully examined the seals and found them to be intact. He immediately gave Mr. Hague a receipt for the package at its face value, and received the express charges for the same amount. On the following morning the package was delivered to R. J. Horton, at the office of Steinfurt Brothers, New York. He opened it in the presence of both members of the New York firm and counted the money."

"Was the amount correct?"

"Quite the contrary," said Mr. Markham, with a vigorous shake of his head. "It was short just seven thousand dollars."

"You don't tell me!"

"That's the fact, Chief Watts!" cried Markham. "Seven of the thousand-dollar bills had been extracted."

"And the package delivered at its face value?"

"Precisely, sir."

"Well, well! That is curious," said Chief Watts. "What happened then?"

Horton was filled with dismay, of course, and rushed to the nearest telegraph office and wired Hague that the package had been received seven thousand dollars short. As a result, Hague came rushing down to our office with the same story. On looking the matter up, I naturally told him that we had safely delivered a package, said by him to contain only five thousand dollars. And then he came out with the truth, and stated for what reason he had had the package marked wrong."

"It seems to be a case of the biter bitten," said Chief Watts. "As a matter of fact, Markham, the Adams Express Company is not responsible for this loss, is it?"

"I think not. The receipts given by the company are covered by the safe delivery of the five thousand dollars," replied Markham. "But that's neither here nor there, Chief Watts. There is no shadow of a doubt that the seven thousand dollars have been stolen."

"They are missing, you mean."

"What's the difference?"

"We sometimes make a distinct difference between stolen money and money that is missing," said Chief Watts, with odd significance. "Were the seals upon the package intact when Horton opened it, Mr. Markham?"

"Yes, sir," nodded the express manager. "I have the envelope at my office. It was opened by slitting the upper edge, and the seals are still in perfect condition."

"None of them broken?"

"Not even cracked, sir."

"Will you please trace the package from Boston to New York, stating through whose hands it passed, up to the time of delivery."

"Certainly I will."

"Note them, Keene!"

"The package first came into the hands of our agent, who gave the receipt for it."

"What is his name, Mr. Markham?"

"His name is Roberts."

"Has he been long in your employ?"

"For a dozen years or more?"

"To whom did it go from him?"

"It was passed to the entry clerk, Chief Watts, who lists the money-packages on the way-bill."

"And what is his name?"

"He is a younger brother of Roberts—a man of about twenty-five years."

"Do both live here in the city?"

"Yes, sir."

"After leaving young Roberts, to whom did it go?"

"To one of our forwarding clerks, a man by the name of Kimball. He placed the package in one of our leather pouches. This

pouch is secured with a metal seal. The pouch containing the package was subsequently turned over to one of our delivery clerks, who carried it in a wagon from the office to the car at the Southern Union Station, where it was delivered to the express messenger who runs through to New York."

"Let me have his name also, Mr. Markham."

"His name is Leary. He put the pouch in a safe in the car, which was locked during the journey. On reaching New York he turned the pouch over to one of our delivery clerks, who carried it in a wagon to the company's New York office. It there was received by one of the clerks. The seal upon the pouch was unbroken. Upon breaking the seal and opening the pouch, the clerk found the money-package in apparently good order, with the wax seals unbroken and the cover untampered with. He in turn gave it to one of the New York delivery clerks, who took the package to Steinfort Brothers' office, and obtained Mr. Horton's receipt for it. That's the whole story, Chief Watts, as far as tracing the package goes. One question still remains to be answered, however."

"And what is that, Mr. Markham?" the chief asked, carelessly.

"Where and how did seven one-thousand dollar bills disappear from that envelope, in the several hands through which the money-package passed?" replied Mr. Markham, decisively.

Chief Watts laughed, lightly.

"On the face of it," he replied; "that don't seem to be a very easy question to answer."

CHAPTER III.

THE DEDUCTIONS OF CHIEF WATTS.

Mr. Markham did not immediately respond to the observation made by Chief Inspector Watts. He sat back in his chair, his face in a brown study, as if even then, after more

than a week of investigation and cudgelling of brains, the mystery involving the loss of the seven thousand dollars was as strange and inexplicable as it had been in the very beginning.

"In the light of all the circumstances, or rather in the darkness of them, for they are dark enough, heaven knows!" he finally observed, "it appears to be one of the most mysterious robberies on record."

Chief Watts looked up from the brief notes taken down by Sheridan Keene, and bent his grave blue eyes on the manager's face.

"Who has been investigating this affair, Mr. Markham?" he asked, with that abrupt earnestness which, in such a man, indicates quickened mental action.

"I have been looking into it in Boston, and Superintendent Zimmerman in New York," was the reply.

"Have the several persons through whose hands, in the usual course of events, this money-package would have passed, been thoroughly examined?"

"Indeed they have, Chief Watts."

"By whom?"

"All by Superintendent Zimmerman, and some by myself."

"What do they state?"

"One and all tell the same story, sir. Our desk man, Roberts, who examined and received for the package, is absolutely sure that the seals were intact when it came into his hands. He is a thoroughly reliable man, one who is exceedingly careful in receiving valuable packages, and we have implicit confidence in him."

"And his younger brother?"

"He also testifies to the perfect condition of the package. He entered it on the way-bill in the usual manner, and is positive concerning it when it left his hands. It went from him to the clerk who makes up the pouches."

"Does he, too, inspect the seals on all packages passing through his hands?"

"Invariably!" exclaimed Mr. Markham. "For he is held responsible for all money-packages that he puts into the pouches for forwarding."

"Does he recall this particular package?"

"Perfectly! He is absolutely certain that it was properly sealed, and in good order. It was put into the pouch, and the latter sealed with the wire and metal stamp."

"Are these pouches made of leather?"

"Yes, sir. And any tampering with them would be easily detected. If ripped open or cut in any way, the fact would be immediately apparent. The pouch cannot be opened without breaking the metal seal, and every agent of our company who receives one of these pouches, is required to examine the seal when receiving and delivering it. In this particular case, every man through whose hands the pouch passed has appeared either before Superintendent Zimmerman or myself, and one and all testify to its perfect condition. So far as we can establish, Chief Watts, the pouch was sent through to New York in the ordinary way, and was so received at the New York office."

"Are these men old and trusted employees of the company?"

"One and all of them, sir."

"What about the agent in New York who opened the pouch?"

"He found the wax seals untouched, and the package apparently in perfect condition. Had this not been so, he would have taken it in person to the consignee, and have had it opened in his presence. As it was, he turned it over to the delivery clerk, who at once carried it to the office of Steinfert Brothers, where he found Mr. Horton waiting."

"Did the agent see Mr. Horton open the package?"

"He did not. Horton gave him a receipt for it, and he came away. The next we knew, was the report of the robbery. Horton wired home to Hague, and also reported his loss at the New York office."

Chief Watts stroked his chin, and asked quietly:

"Do you wish me to undertake to find this money, or at least to apprehend the person by whom it was stolen?"

"That is precisely what I am here for, Chief Watts."

"I will look into the case, then. Are the documents, envelope and pouch where I can see them?"

"They are at Superintendent Zimmerman's office, in New York."

"Very good. I want now an orderly list of the several parties through whose hands the package passed, after leaving the bank messenger."

"I will give you their names in full, if Detective Keene will note them," bowed Markham, referring to his book.

A few minutes were occupied in tabulating the several names, and then Chief Watts said, quietly:

"I think that is all, Mr. Markham. When I have anything to communicate, I will notify you."

"Will you go to work upon the case immediately, chief?"

"I never delay in a case of criminal investigation," was the rather dry rejoinder. "I will report upon the matter as soon as possible."

The portly manager arose, bowing his approval, and departed.

"Well, Sheridan Keene, here is something for you to take hold of," observed Chief Watts, laughing lightly.

"Rather a mysterious case," rejoined Keene, looking up from his notes.

"It is a matter of identity," said Chief

Watts, with a quick flash of his blue eyes. "That money did not evaporate, my boy. Bank-notes usually stay where they are put, unless some person's fingers get upon them, and these seven one-thousand-dollar bills did not, of course, escape of themselves from that sealed envelope, assuming that they were put into it. This money has been stolen, deliberately and adroitly. It becomes a case of establishing the identity of the thief, the hand of the guilty."

"Do you wish me to undertake the investigation?" asked Keene, quietly.

"Yes, you had better do so, and plan to make a systematic study of the case."

"Have you any suggestions to offer?"

"There are certain pertinent features of the case, which no doubt appeal to you as well as to me," Chief Watts said, drawing nearer and taking up the detective's block of notes. "I will run them over."

"I wish you would."

"They permit of a few deductions, merely. This Mr. Hague evidently is not perfectly honest, as appears in his attempt to defraud the express company. It was a dirty little scheme for the sake of saving, as Mr. Markham expressed it, a few paltry dollars. Whether there is some deeper scheme on the part of Horton & Hague, remains to be discovered."

"Can they recover from the express company?"

"I do not think so. The express company has delivered a package valued at five thousand dollars, which is all it agreed to do. Horton & Hague could recover only by expensive litigation, and as the money was drawn against their own deposit in the Mutual National Bank, I am inclined to think their design was merely one to reduce express charges."

"That seems reasonable."

"Yet I think you had better go to New

York, and investigate that end of the case in a quiet way. Have a talk with Steinfort Brothers, and learn the precise circumstances under which the package was received and opened. Find out if the New York firm saw the money taken from the envelope and counted, and just what Horton's movements and observations were, both then and previous to the receipt of the package."

"I will do so."

"Then visit Superintendent Zimmerman, and examine the evidence in his possession. If you think it necessary, you may interview each of the parties through whose hands the money-package passed. At present, however, I do not think the money was abstracted by any of the express company's employees. The evidence is that the package went through in good time, and was received in good order."

"I think you are right, Chief Watts," nodded Keene. "I believe that all the money that was put under seal was safely delivered. Whether Horton adroitly abstracted any of it when opening the package, is a question. Also, whether the entire amount was put in the envelope."

"It is my present idea that the theft was committed at either one end of the transaction or the other. Yet Hague is positive that the bank clerk enclosed and sealed the entire amount, and a collusion between the two is hardly probable. You had better look them up, however."

"Never doubt that I will do that," laughed Sheridan Keene.

"Also the bank messenger who took the package from the bank to the express office, and whom Hague made it a point to accompany. There may be some knavery between those two, for I don't quite like the actions of Hague. It is barely possible that he is scheming to defraud Horton, his partner."

"By Jove, that's so!"

"I rather think the felony was in some way

committed at this end of the transaction," added the chief, with grave earnestness. "You had better make a thorough investigation in New York, however, to obviate the need of a second journey; and then, if you discover no more than Markham has disclosed, take up the case at this end."

"I will be governed by your suggestions, chief."

"Be guided, rather; and let your own judgment govern you," replied Chief Watts. "When will you go to New York?"

"By the first train," said Sheridan Keene, rising and taking his hat.

CHAPTER IV.

KEENE MAKES A CHANCE ACQUAINTANCE.

It was nearly five o'clock, almost the hour when the magnificent steamer *Puritan*, of the Fall River line between New York and Boston, should clear from the pier in East River, and begin her night trip through the Sound.

The dock was crowded with vehicles of nearly every description. Longshoremen were rushing the last packages of merchandise into the steamer's hold. Porters, cabmen and stewards were stirring in every direction, and a throng of people were surging to and from the palatial boat.

On the main deck amidships, just forward of the paddle-box, Sheridan Keene stood gazing down upon the busy and tumultuous scene. Several days had passed since the scene in the office of Chief Watts, and Keene was now returning to Boston, his mission in New York having been accomplished.

It had not been fruitful. His inquiries at the office of Steinfort Brothers, and his examination of the evidence in the hands of Superintendent Zimmerman, with whom he had had a long consideration of the mysterious robbery, had served only to sustain the statements made by Mr. Markham.

The result was not encouraging, and Sheri-

idan Keene felt out of sorts. There are cases at times that baffle the persistent efforts of the most astute detectives, and ultimately fade into the dim and shadowy vistas of the past, unsolved and finally forgotten.

In all the cases assigned him, Sheridan Keene never yet had suffered the chagrin and disappointment of failure; but the mystery of the Adams express package seemed to grow darker with every step he had taken, and despite his habitual confidence and determination, the shadow of failure irrepressibly stole upon and depressed him.

"All ashore who're going ashore! All ashore who're going!"

The warning cry of the colored porter came up to his ears, and the hurry of people over the gangway increased. The dull, long-sustained bellow of the steamer's whistle augmented the general din. The *Puritan* was about to clear from the pier.

Sheridan Keene approached one of the passages giving egress to the main saloon, and was about to enter, when the sound of loud voices from the dock caused him to return.

"Hold on with the gangway!" roared one.

"Here's another passenger!"

"Belay, there!"

Keene again approached the rail and looked down.

Threading its way among the many vehicles on the dock, as if guided by a hand accustomed to such confusion, a hansom cab was rapidly approaching. It stopped nearly opposite the gangway. The passenger was a young woman, and as the cabman sprang down to her assistance, half a dozen colored porters also ran to her aid.

"Hurry up, there!" yelled the purser's assistant, from the boat.

"Ay, ay, sir! All aboard!"

And before the delinquent young lady fairly realized it, she and her single piece of luggage had been hustled over the gangway

and into the lower saloon, and the gang-plank withdrawn.

"A close shave," thought Sheridan Keene, laughing to himself. "Curious how women delay until the very last moment."

He had noticed only the general appearance of the woman, yet the incident rather pleased him; she had been received and handled with such unceremonious celerity. He did not imagine he should see her again amid the throng upon the boat, for the month was October, and the transportation large. Instead of entering the cabin, he now mounted to the upper deck, to view the animated prospect as the huge steamer plowed her way up the East River and under the Brooklyn Bridge.

He descended a half hour later, and went forward. He was intent only upon pleasantly passing the time until dinner was served, and all the while was revolving in mind the mysterious case engaging his attention. He had no eyes for the other passengers, save in a general way; yet, he passed through the forward saloon to seek the forward deck, and noticed some distance in advance of him the woman who had so tardily boarded the boat as she was about leaving.

Closer inspection revealed her to be a young woman, and he imagined her not more than twenty-two, with a pretty face and bright eyes, of a kind termed roguish. While there was considerable of it, the color in her cheeks was natural, and she was stylishly dressed.

There was something about her, nevertheless, which led Sheridan Keene, who was an acute observer of persons and character, to dryly remark within himself:

"If she were a boat, I should call her rakish."

She passed out to the forward deck in advance of him, and Keene presently approached the door by which she had dis-

peared. As he forced it open against the pressure of wind outside, the sound of the girl's voice came sharply to his ears.

"You are no gentleman!" she cried.

The words were not addressed to Sheridan Keene, but they quickened instantly that manly and valiant part of his nature which responded to distress in a woman. He stepped out upon the deck, and the door closed sharply behind him.

A mere glance at the scene told him the whole situation. Because of the furious breeze forward there were but few people outside, and these were scattered. Down near the starboard rail, with her garments twined about her graceful figure by the rush of the wind, the girl whom he had noticed was shrinking from the bold and unwarrantable advances of a young fellow in a flashy, plaid suit, whose scurrilous smile and general air of insolent familiarity showed at once that he was attempting to force the girl's acquaintance.

"Now don't be foolishly offended," he at once replied, not observing Keene. "Of course you know me, and I can tell you just where we met last. I know I am not mistaken, because I never forget a pretty face like yours."

"You are mistaken!" angrily declared the girl, with cheeks red and eyes flashing. "You are an insolent cad!"

"Ah, no, I'm not! For you will listen——"

"Let me go back to the cabin!"

"Hold one moment! I——"

"Let the girl return, if she wishes," commanded Sheridan Keene, drawing nearer.

The fellow in plaid wheeled sharp about, and then involuntarily recoiled from the look in the detective's frowning eyes. He hung fire for an instant, then demanded, resentfully:

"Aren't you meddling with what don't concern you?"

"Do you think so?"

"I do! This lady is an old acquaintance, only she forgets——"

"Stop right there!" cried Keene, sternly. "Your own face declares you a liar! Now, you go about your own business, and don't molest this girl, or I'll thrash you within an inch of your life! If that is not strong enough, I'll do it here and now!"

There were few men who, if in the wrong, would stand up before Sheridan Keene's anger and indignation. For a moment only the fellow in plaid hesitated, and then he slunk away with a sneer on his lips, and crossed to the port rail.

Keene turned to the girl as if nothing had happened.

"I beg your pardon for interposing," he said, raising his hat; "but the circumstances appeared to warrant it."

He felt inclined to laugh at the picture she now presented. The wind had given her hat a cant to one side, adding a ludicrous effect to her general rakish appearance; while the insolence to which she had been subjected had increased the glow in her cheeks, and the fire in her brilliant eyes. The latter were so sparkling, indeed, that Keene decided that she had dined with friends before embarking, and that wine had been served with the courses.

A smile dispelled the stern severity of the detective's handsome face when he addressed her, at which the girl burst out laughing, and replied with an abandon that rather startled him:

"Oh, you are a jolly good fellow to have done it. Not that I was afraid of the sauce-box; far from it. But it served him right to be called down by a man who is a man, and I am your debtor that much."

"Don't mention it," said Keene, amused despite himself by her volubility, and never dreaming that she possibly could be con-

cerned in the mysterious robbery of the Adams Express Company. "Are you traveling alone?"

"Quite so—up to the present time," she added, laughing archly.

Keene smiled and drew nearer.

"On your way to Boston?" he asked, lightly.

"Yes."

"Live there?"

"When I am at home."

"So do I. Perhaps I know some of your people," said Keene, fishing for her name.

"No, you don't," she replied; "for I haven't any. I am a poor lone orphan of tender years," she added, with a giggle.

Despite his acuteness, Sheridan Keene could not quite take the girl's measure. She did not look like a girl about town, and her manner had the flavor of artlessness, despite her abandon, which may have been due to what little wine she had indulged herself. The girl was evidently shrewd and self-reliant, however, and Keene ventured to ask, with a politeness that tempered the question:

"Where do you live in Boston?"

"On Appleton street. I have a room there, and take my meals out."

"Do you visit New York frequently?"

"No; never was there before," was the reply, with a short laugh. "But I have a cousin there, and I ran over to see her and have a bit of a lark. But, heavens, sir! she's too familiarly fly for me, so I gave her the slip in Delmonico's and flew down-town to the boat in a hansom cab. 'Twas a close call getting it, at that."

Keene smiled, as he recalled the incident.

"So I observed," he rejoined. "I saw you when you embarked. Would you like to return to the cabin? It is quite windy out here."

"Yes, if you please," she replied, with a roguish glance at Keene's fine, dark eyes.

"Take my hand, or I may be blown overboard."

"That would be disastrous," laughed Keene, assisting her to the saloon. "Shall you dine on the boat?"

"No, I have had all I want and am going to bed, when I find my state-room. Perhaps I will see you on the train in the morning, if you wish," she added.

"Very pleased, I am sure," bowed Keene. "Do you have any occupation in Boston, may I ask?"

"Well, I work at times," she said, slowly; then added: "This is only a little vacation."

"I see," nodded Keene.

"I had a little money, so thought I would take a week off and enjoy myself."

"Some money you had saved" said Keene, casually.

To his surprise, the girl shot a quick glance at him, so sharp and suspicious that he could not but observe it.

"Yes, of course, I saved it!" she exclaimed. "Where do you suppose I got it?"

"I meant no offense," said Keene, assuavely.

"None taken, then, I assure you," laughed the girl, yet her eyes were still suspiciously studying his. "Yes, I saved the money, of course. I have no one to give me any. No such good luck as that."

"May I inquire your name?"

"Why not, indeed!" she exclaimed, with a shrug of her shoulders. "It is Annie Malcolm. Pretty name, isn't it?"

"Very!" bowed Keene, laughing.

"What's yours?"

"My name is Sheridan," was the evasive reply.

"Mr. Sheridan, eh? Well, that's not bad! I am going to my room, now, Mr. Sheridan. I may see you in the morning."

So the incident began and ended. Sheridan Keene felt no special interest in the girl,

and did not rise for the early train from Fall River; and before he had set foot in Boston the following morning, both the girl and her name had passed out of his mind.

CHAPTER V.

KEENE MAKES A PROFESSIONAL BLUFF.

On arriving in Boston, after an absence of several days, Sheridan Keene immediately returned to headquarters and made his official report to Chief Inspector Watts.

Though his task had been efficiently performed, the report was not an encouraging one. The conduct of Horton when in New York had apparently been open and above board. He had received the express package in the ordinary way, and had opened it in the office and presence of both members of the New York firm, both of whom were positive that the envelope had contained only five thousand dollars.

"I cannot think that all of these men are concerned in this fraud," said Chief Watts, in commenting upon the report. "The amount stolen is not sufficient to have attracted them, even were they inclined to obtain money by fraudulent methods. I think you may safely drop the Steinforts out of the case."

"I also think so," said Sheridan Keene, gravely. "The cut of both men, moreover, was all in their favor. I don't believe either would have sold himself for this mere bagatelle of money."

"What did you learn from Zimmerman?"

"He corroborated in every respect the statements made here by Mr. Markham," Keene replied. "He has rigidly examined every person through whose hands the package passed, and states that he is perfectly satisfied that the theft was not committed by any of the company's employees."

"Did you examine the pouch and envelope in which the money was forwarded?"

"Thoroughly, chief. I found everything

as represented. There was absolutely no evidence that the money was abstracted during the transportation of the package."

"It is a decidedly mysterious case," said Chief Watts, bluntly. "I cannot believe that Hague is in collusion with the bank messenger, who took the package to the express office, nor with the clerk who sealed the money in its cover. All that is too far-fetched. Hague would have had too little to gain by it."

"That is very true," assented Keene. "Still I am inclined to think the crime was committed at the Boston end of the transaction."

"Didn't Mr. Markham state that Hague is positive that Dean, the bank clerk, put the entire amount under seal?"

"That is what he stated."

"Which ought to relieve Dean of all suspicion, if Hague states the truth."

"It would appear so, certainly."

"It's an infernally strange affair," said Chief Watts, with some irritation. "I don't propose to rack my brains over it much longer. We'll take the bull by the horns, Keene, and I will tell you what to do. You go down to Horton & Hague's office, and see Hague alone. Put up a good, strong bluff on the lines I have suggested!"

"Very well."

"You'll be able to read the man, I think," added the chief. "Make the bluff strong enough to bring him out, and see what you think of him."

It was with somewhat of the same spirit, that Sheridan Keene entered the large clothing house of Horton & Hague a little later, and fortunately found the junior partner alone in the private office.

"I am told you are Mr. Hague," Keene bluntly said, on entering the room. "I want to see you alone for a few moments."

Hague looked up from his desk in some

surprise. He was a short, dark man, about forty, of gentlemanly appearance, yet with a rather crafty cast of countenance.

"And who may you be?" he curtly demanded, resenting the detective's tone.

"I am Inspector Keene, of the detective force, and am investigating the recent theft from an Adams express package."

Before the last words were uttered, Hague sprang up and quickly closed the office door.

"Ah, excuse me, Detective Keene!" he exclaimed, smiling and extending his hand. "I knew you by name, but your face was not familiar. I am glad to see you. Sit down. What do you find in this case?"

"I find, Mr. Hague," Keene sternly answered, taking a seat directly opposite his hearer, "that you have been working a very shrewd and artful game!"

"Why, how's that?"

"Now, the sooner you come down with the whole truth, and square yourself up, the better it will be for you."

Hague turned very pale, but the expression of his face was that of intense surprise and wonderment.

"Do you refer," he faltered, doubtfully, "to my foolish attempt to reduce the express charges on the package I forwarded?"

"I refer to nothing of the kind!"

"Good heavens, Detective Keene, to what, then?" gasped Hague, more than ever startled and dismayed. "I am guilty of no other transgression."

"Yes, you are, and you know it!" cried Sheridan Keene, with a severity which few men would have cared to face. "Now, Hague, I want the whole truth! Either here, or at the chief's office, it don't matter which!"

"But I have told the whole truth!" cried Hague, throwing both his hands above his head with emphatic protest. "I know no more about the theft than you do. I wish

to heaven I did, for you surely know very little, since you came here with such a front as this."

"Do you mean to assert, Mr. Hague, that you did not abstract that money, for the sole purpose of defrauding your own partner?" demanded Keene, with unabated severity; yet he already felt sure he was on the wrong scent.

Hague threw back his head and laughed with bitter scorn.

"That theory is absurd on the face of it," he cried, angrily. "Why, sir, Horton knew all about it from the beginning. I will admit it was a piece of infernal folly, however, misrepresenting the amount to be forwarded, and in that we were lamentably culpable; but when you assert that I have designed to defraud Horton, that is absolutely false and without foundation. Horton knew that the package was to be marked wrong. We agreed to that before he went to New York, the matter having been discussed while we were at lunch the day before he went. That petty fraud was adopted merely on impulse, and we are now heartily ashamed of it. It seemed as safe to mark the package as we did, and so save the extra charges. That is all I know of the affair, and you may think what you please, and do what you please, Detective Keene!"

The speaker's looks and manner now satisfied Sheridan Keene that he spoke the truth, and that he again must seek further for the criminal.

"Furthermore," added Hague, decisively, "I could have gained but little by such a scheme as you evidently suspect. For half the money drawn against our account was legally mine, and I could have acquired only that belonging to Horton, even though I might have been able to effect the design. I tell you for good and all, I never touched that

twelve thousand dollars, or the package containing it, after Mr. Dean put it under seal."

Keene's features relaxed, and he laughed lightly.

"Well, Mr. Hague, I will take your word for it," he replied, with a gracious wave of his hand. "As a matter of fact, I have been making only a professional bluff, in order to draw you out, and see what I could make of you."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Now, pray don't be offended by it," said Keene. "It is a very mysterious case, and we are using every effort and means to locate the criminal and to recover your money. Since your foolish attempt to reduce express charges was not quite honorable, moreover, you cannot well blame me for wishing to take your measure."

Hague colored deeply at this pointed remark and was pacified more by his own sense of shame than by Sheridan Keene's blunt explanation.

"You are right, Detective Keene," he admitted. "I don't much wonder that you suspected me of much more than I am guilty, but I can assure you to the contrary. Before going to New York, my partner knew precisely what I was going to do."

"I understood you to say, I think, that this idea of reducing express charges was impulsively brought up and adopted," said Keene, gravely. "Is that true?"

"Precisely, sir. Horton and I were at lunch at the time, and he remarked that the package would carry as safely if marked five thousand dollars as it would if it were marked twelve thousand dollars, and that the expense would be less. I thought it rather a clever idea, without giving much thought to the fraudulent part of the act; and I told Horton that I would draw the twelve thousand dollars from the Mutual National Bank on the following Thursday morning,

and forward the same in a package marked as suggested."

"Did he state at that time that you should address the package to Horton, in care of Steinfort Brothers?"

"I think so," nodded Hague, "though I can't say positively as to that. That really was all there was said about it, and on making the withdrawal I did as I had agreed. I am sorry for it, now, I assure you."

"No doubt of it," said Sheridan Kane, dryly. "Did you see Dean, the bank clerk, put the money in the envelope?"

"I did, and watched him carefully until it was under seal."

"Why did you do that? Did you have any misgivings concerning him?"

"No, I did not," Hague immediately replied. "But Dean is at present taking the place of the regular teller, who is away on a vacation, and naturally I do not know him as well as I know the regular man. Hence, I looked out to see that everything was all right. I am absolutely certain that Dean put the entire twelve thousand dollars in the envelope, and sealed the flap securely. I would take an oath to that, Detective Keene, for I saw him do it with my own eyes."

"As a matter of fact, then, Mr. Hague, you think that Dean cannot possibly be involved in this theft?"

"Well, sir, I can truthfully say that I felt about as sure of him as of myself, for I certainly know what I saw," replied Mr. Hague, with genuine assurance.

"Was there any delay in calling a bank messenger, and delivering the sealed package to him?"

"None at all," said Mr. Hague, with emphasis. "The messenger was less than ten feet away, and he at once received the package which Dean had sealed. The entire transaction required less than five minutes."

"I presume you were outside of the teller's enclosure?"

"Yes, naturally."

"Were you alone there?"

"I think a young lady came into the bank just after I did, for I saw one waiting to approach the window at which I was standing. I did not notice any other person, and hardly noticed her. My interest was in the twelve

thousand dollars until the money was safely under seal."

Sheridan Keene nodded gravely, and rose to make his departure. He felt that there was nothing more to be learned from Horton & Hague. What he had accomplished served only to dispel the misgivings with which he had entered, and he departed with a feeling that the mystery of the robbery was now darker and deeper than ever.

CHAPTER VI.

SHERIDAN KEENE STRIKES A CLUE.

It was nearly two o'clock when Detective Keene emerged to the street. There was an unusual fire in his dark eyes, and the pressure of his lips indicated that he was not pleased, either with himself or the case.

He felt that intense irritation which sometimes results from persistently working over a perplexing puzzle, which one has inwardly determined to solve, but finds it utterly impossible. In this rather disagreeable frame of mind, he hailed the first cab he saw, and was driven down to the Mutual National Bank, into which he entered.

It presented the usual appearance of such an institution. He bestowed merely a glance at the several windows of the clerks and tellers, and at once approached the door of the private room occupied by the bank cashier.

"Is Mr. Evans inside?" he asked of one of the clerks in the enclosure.

"Yes, sir; he is," was the reply. "You may step in if you wish to see him."

Keene opened the door, and was received by an elderly man in glasses, to whom he explained his mission.

Cashier Evans at once exhibited much interest.

"Take a chair, Mr. Keene," he said, quickly. "I understand that this case is mystifying even you shrewd detectives. While the amount involved is not large, I really hope the thief and his method may be discovered, lest a second attempt is made. In what way can I help you to solve the mystery?"

"I wish to ask you a few questions, if you will kindly permit me to do so," said Keene, with grave politeness.

"With pleasure," bowed Cashier Evans, wiping his glasses. "I will answer them to the best of my ability."

"Is it true, sir, that you saw Mr. Hague at the time he presented his firm's check for twelve thousand dollars?"

"Yes, it is true, was the ready reply. "I was in the teller's cage with Mr. Dean at the time, and I not only saw Mr. Hague, but I went and spoke to him."

"Did you observe any indications of nervousness in his manner?"

"None whatever."

"Did he ask for notes of any specific denomination?"

"He merely requested that he might have large bills, as he wanted to express the amount to New York. I asked him why he did not send a draft, and he explained why. I did not quite approve of his plan, yet it was his business, not mine. I saw the teller give him cash for the check."

"I understand that he then requested that the notes should be put under seal for sending to New York."

"Precisely," bowed Mr. Evans. "I then told Mr. Dean to do as requested, as I was busy at the time, and I returned to my private office. I thought nothing more about the matter, and was greatly surprised when word came to me that more than half of the contents of the package had been mysteriously stolen."

"I understand that Mr. Dean is taking the position of a teller who is on his vacation," said Keene, inquiringly.

"That is true," was the reply; "but Mr. Dean is thoroughly honest and competent."

Sheridan Keene did not deny the statement, nevertheless he could recall instances in which trusted bank clerks had proved dishonest.

"Do you object to my visiting the teller's cage, Mr. Evans?" he asked, quietly.

"Not at all," replied the cashier, rising. "Come out this way."

He led the detective through a side door of the office, and into the clerk's enclosure. The cage mentioned was a high lattice-work of brass, which prevents intrusion upon the teller, and protects the large sums of money he handles daily. Approaching the door,

which also was of brass lattice-work, the cashier said to the man inside:

"Allow this gentleman to enter the cage for a moment, Mr. Dean, if you please."

"That will not be necessary," interposed Keene. "I can see from here all that I require."

Nevertheless, Mr. Dean opened the door and stood to one side, that the visitor might examine the enclosure. It was like hundreds of others in the banks throughout the country, with which all are more or less familiar.

"George, this is Inspector Keene," said the cashier, by way of introduction. "He is investigating the mysterious robbery suffered by Horton & Hague."

Keene looked up and met for the first time the eyes of the man who had sealed the money-package. They were dark eyes, with a studied composure in their sombre depths. The brows nearly met at the bridge of the man's nose, and were like a heavy straight line at the base of his square forehead. Yet his face was fairly prepossessing, evincing a strong will and an aggressive temperament. He appeared to be about thirty-five, and was solidly put together.

"Pleased to meet you, Inspector Keene," he said, in a low, chest tone, while he bowed with grave complacency. "I hope you will succeed in running down the clever miscreant guilty of this robbery. I shall feel easier when that is done, Inspector Keene, for I am not blind to inferences that might arise, because of the fact that I was the person who put that money under seal."

Sheridan Keene smiled pleasantly and shook his head, yet there was a curious light steadily stealing into his eyes.

"I should have no feeling about it, Mr. Dean, if I were you," he said, lightly. "In all I can learn of the case, I find nothing to warrant your misgivings. Never put a soiled coat voluntarily on your back."

Dean colored deeply at this, and did not appear to like the observation; but he resented it only with a slight frown.

"I will admit it's a foolish thing to do," he said, in a heavy, subdued tone that was characteristic of him. "Yet one must feel

more or less sensitive over such a circumstance."

"That is true, in a measure," bowed Keene, noting again the various features of the cage, and the bundles of bank-notes like miniature wood-piles on the counter at one side. "Is that the desk at which you stood when you sealed the package, Mr. Dean?"

"Yes, sir. The wax and seal are always kept where you see them."

"Were you alone in the cage at the time?"

"I was alone, sir, after Mr. Evans left."

"At the time you were sealing the package, I mean."

"I was alone then, sir."

"Did you happen to observe that Mr. Hague was closely watching your movements?"

"I cannot say that I did," Dean replied, with a quick glance at the detective's face. "I did the work in the usual way, sir, and it was nothing to me whether or not Mr. Hague watched me closely."

"No, of course not," observed Sheridan Keene, with quiet suavity. "I am looking chiefly after testimony that may sustain a theory I have been led to form. I think, Mr. Evans, if this gentleman can be spared from his desk for a few moments only, I would like to talk with him in private."

The cashier looked the least bit surprised, and Mr. Dean's heavy dark brows dropped a trifle; but the former immediately rejoined:

"Certainly, Detective Keene, if you wish. I will fill the teller's place while he is absent. George, go to the directors' room with Detective Keene, and if you can give him any information by which he can solve this mysterious robbery, pray do so."

"I will, with pleasure, Mr. Evans, if I am able," said Dean, now joining the detective outside, and leading the way across the enclosure and into the directors' room.

Keene closed the door by which they had entered, and carelessly took a seat on the arm of one of the large, leather-covered chairs near the long table; while George Dean remained standing nearly opposite.

The clerk's manner now was not entirely composed, and his cheeks had become very pale. Though a man is innocent of evil, if he is involved by suspicious circumstances,

an interview with a detective rather tends to disturb him; and the searching scrutiny Keene now was bestowing upon the clerk's face evidently was not wholly to Dean's liking.

But the voice of the detective still retained its courteous gravity.

"Do you recall at what hour Mr. Hague presented his check at your window?" he asked, for a starter.

"It was about ten o'clock, sir."

"Did you notice anything unusual in his manner?"

"I did not," said Dean, slowly shaking his head. "He passed the check through the window, and asked for large bills. He and Mr. Evans then conversed for a moment or two, while I was counting the money, which I passed out to Hague as soon as I had it ready."

"Did Hague count the money?"

"He did, sir; then passed it back to me, and requested that it might be put under seal and addressed to his partner, who was in New York. Mr. Evans told me to comply with the request, and I did so."

"Did Evans then withdraw?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you then do?"

"I addressed the envelope as requested."

"Did you then mark the amount on it?"

"Not at that time, sir. Mr. Hague did not ask me to do that until later," Dean hastened to reply. "I passed the notes out to Mr. Hague, and asked him if he wished to verify the amount before it was sealed."

"Why did you do that?" asked Sheridan Keene, with startling abruptness.

"Why?"

"Yes, why!" reiterated Keene, with his gaze steadily searching the dark eyes of the man confronting him. "Had not Hague already counted the money? Why did you wish him to count it a second time?"

Dean's heavy brows knit darkly. For an instant a fire like that of suppressed fury appeared in the eyes steadily meeting those of the detective, and the cheeks of the clerk turned strangely pale. Whether these were the signs of suppressed anger and resentment, or the irrepressible betrayal of con-

scious guilt, Sheridan Keene did not then determine.

"It was a perfectly natural thing for me to do," Dean answered, with quick, semi-subdued vehemence. "The money had been lying loose on the counter. There were other packages near by, and some error might possibly have resulted. It was perfectly natural, I repeat, that I should ask Mr. Hague to verify the amount, immediately before placing it in the envelope."

"Well, well, I did not say that it wasn't," Keene quietly rejoined, with a curious smile. "Why do you resent my question so impulsively?"

"I resent your tone, more than your question," Dean retorted. "One would think you considered my conduct to have been suspicious."

"Not at all, Mr. Dean," replied the detective. "I have said once before, that a man is foolish who puts a soiled coat on his own back. Let it drop, please, and answer my questions. Did Hague comply with your suggestion, and again count the money?"

"Yes, he did."

"And did you then put it under seal?"

"Immediately, sir," said Dean, now with a sullen, almost defiant manner.

"Was it after you had done so that Hague requested you to mark the package with a fictitious value?"

"It was."

"Did you make any objection to doing so?"

"I told him I thought it should be properly marked," Dean answered, curtly. "He assured me, however, that there was nothing special involved in it, and as he is an old depositor here, and Mr. Evans had instructed me to do as requested, I did what Hague asked me to do."

"Why did you not consult Mr. Evans upon such a peculiar matter?"

"I didn't think it was necessary."

"Didn't you think it was rather an extraordinary request?"

"I did, sir; but I took Hague's assurance for what I considered it worth. I did it, Inspector Keene, and that's all there is to it."

"Evidently!"

Dean now openly resented the curt expletive of the detective. He came nearer, his

face white with suppressed passion, and said, vehemently:

"Look here, Detective Keene, you appear to think that I know more of this affair than I have told. It is not true. I am as innocent of any deliberate wrong as you are. I know only what I have stated, which is the whole truth. Furthermore, there was another witness to the entire transaction, and you can look her up also, if you like."

Sheridan Keene heard him without a change of countenance.

"What witness is that?" he asked, quietly.

"A girl who stood waiting near the window while Hague gave me his instructions," said Dean, umbrageously. "She saw the whole transaction, and heard all that was said."

"How do you know that?" Keene demanded, curtly.

"Because she has eyes and ears, sir, and must have seen and heard," cried Dean, forcibly. "She stood almost at Hague's elbow, and must have been deaf and blind if she did not observe. I saw her smile, moreover, at the time."

"Who is the girl?" asked Keene, with an air of indifference.

"I am not certain about her name," Dean answered. "She called at my counter to get a bill changed. I know where she may be found, however, if you wish to question her. And I wish you would, as a matter of fact, for my own sake. She will state it just as it occurred."

"Where can I find her?"

"She is employed at the Orient Café, as a waitress."

Don't you know her name?"

"I have heard her called Annie at the café," replied Dean, with some display of uncertainty. "I think her name is Annie Malcolm."

Sheridan Keene suppressed a betrayal of his immediate surprise.

"Annie Malcolm, eh," he rejoined, lightly. "At the Orient Café, did you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you generally lunch there, Mr. Dean?"

"Only occasionally," rejoined the latter. "But I have seen the girl there, and I recalled

her face when she came to my counter that morning."

Sheridan Keene nodded, understandingly.

"Possibly I may decide to look her up," he said, indifferently. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Dean, I am rather inclined to believe that this robbery was a scheme of Hague's own designing, in an attempt to defraud his partner."

"No!" exclaimed Dean, with an instantaneous change of countenance.

"For a fact; only don't disclose it," said Keene, with a series of significant little nods. "I am having hard work, however, to discover just how the money was abstracted; hence I came here to question you. As for suspecting you in any way, I had not dreamed of it."

"Well, I am glad to hear you say that."

Keene laid his hand on the clerk's shoulder in a friendly sort of way.

"You should be careful, moreover, how you go over the traces without occasion, Mr. Dean," he quietly advised. "One sometimes invites suspicion by resenting it too impulsively. But I am a man of more than ordinary discernment, Mr. Dean, though I say it who shouldn't, and I quite appreciate your sentiments. Now, return to your desk, and leave the matter to me."

"I trust you now free me from suspicion," ventured Dean, delaying their departure for a moment.

"Pshaw! I have not even had you in mind," exclaimed Keene, in accents of friendly assurance. "Go on, now, and let me alone to find the hand of the guilty."

CHAPTER VII.

A NETWORK OF EVIDENCE.

Sheridan Keene now remained at the bank only long enough to thank Cashier Evans for his kindness, then nodded in a friendly way in the direction of Dean, who had returned to his duty at the teller's counter.

The young detective returned to the street in a more amiable frame of mind, however, than that with which he had entered the bank. Quite contrary to his anticipations, for all the testimony he had previously gathered indicated that no officer of the bank was prob-

ably involved in the mysterious robbery, he now had run upon what he considered quite a promising clew.

Though the method by which the theft had been so adroitly effected was still a mystery, Sheridan Keene now felt sure there must be some collusion between George Dean and the girl to whom the latter had referred him; and that one or both of them were concerned in the crime.

Dean had not favorably impressed him, moreover. Despite his gentlemanly exterior, his strongly-marked features indicated a crafty nature, and a will that would not calmly suffer opposition. Before he had talked long with him, Keene had decided that only some desperate and threatening emergency would be required to turn George Dean from a gentleman to a ruffian.

The striking of a promising trail was a new stimulus to the detective, and, despite the indifferent interest he had displayed in the presence of Dean, Keene at once set out for the Oriental Café. This was an elaborate lunch-room, not far removed from the business section of the city, and was chiefly noted for its excellent *cuisine*, and the pretty girls invariably employed to wait at the tables.

It was long after the busy hours of noon-day when Keene entered the place and inquired for the proprietor. A girl cashier had a desk near the entrance, and directed him to one of the booths near the rear of the long room; and there Keene found a smooth-faced, elderly man in a long white apron, who evidently had come out of the kitchen to enjoy a lunch at one of his own tables.

Keene immediately introduced himself, awakening some show of surprise in the face of his hearer, who received him quite courteously and begged him to take a seat at the opposite side of the table.

"What can I do for you, Detective Keene?" he asked, unctuously, laying down his knife and fork. "I am not very often favored with a call from an officer; I hope nothing has happened to threaten my license?"

"I know of nothing," laughed Keene, taking the man in at a glance. "I wish to ascertain if you have a girl in your employ by the name of Annie Malcolm?"

A change in the man's face at once showed that he was much more willing to discuss the girl than himself; and he readily answered: "No, she is no longer here, sir."

"Then you have had a girl here by that name, have you?"

"Yes, for several months. She left here a week or ten days ago."

"Was she discharged?"

"No, sir; she left voluntarily."

"Did she give any reason for making the change?"

"She said the work did not agree with her, I believe," was the reply. "The duties of a waitress are quite arduous, you know, and she thought she was injured by standing so many hours each day."

"I see," nodded Keene. "Do you happen to know anything about the girl?"

"Do you refer to her character?"

"You may assume that I do."

"So far as I know, then, Annie Malcolm is a girl of good character. She came to work here last winter, and has given general satisfaction. I think she is rather inclined to fancy the young men, but that is rather general with the girls, and not particularly to Annie Malcolm's discredit, speaking from what I have seen. I really can say nothing against the girl."

"Was she the kind who saves money?"

The man of chops and coffee laughed lightly.

"Well, judging from what I paid her, she could not save much and live at all."

"What did you pay her, may I ask?"

"Four dollars a week."

"Do you know where she is at present?"

"I do not. I have not seen her since she left here."

"Do you know where she lives?"

"She lodges somewhere on Appleton street, I believe. I don't know the number."

"Possibly one of your girls may," suggested Keene.

"I will inquire, if you will excuse me."

Keene nodded his assent, and the proprietor of the Oriental Café hastened to make the inquiry, and presently returned with the information desired.

"One of the girls knew the number, as you suggested," he added. "What has Annie

Malcolm done that the law is now looking for her?"

"I am not sure that she has been doing anything," Keene replied; "but I wish to locate her. You observed that she had a leaning toward the young men. Do you know any particular one?"

"No, I do not."

"Possibly there may have been one who came here daily to lunch, and regularly took a seat at Annie Malcolm's table," Keene again suggested.

"If there was," he replied, "I should not have observed it, for I am in the kitchen during the busy hours."

"That does not matter much, though," added Keene. "I now would like to know the day of the month on which she decided to leave here."

"It was the twelfth, I am very sure," was the reply, after a moment.

That was the day after the mysterious robbery, and Sheridan Keene made a note of it in his mind.

"I presume you occasionally send one of your girls out for the purpose of getting a bank-note changed?" he next asked.

"Yes, occasionally, but not frequently. I usually keep a supply of small bills."

"Do you recall whether or not, on the day previous to her leaving, Annie Malcolm was sent out to get a bill changed?"

"No, I cannot say positively, but I think it is very doubtful. Ordinarily, my cashier would have gone out for the purpose, if any one."

"Are your girls busy here at ten o'clock in the morning?"

"Yes, sir; always."

"Then, if Annie Malcolm had wished to go out upon the street at that time, would she not naturally have applied to you for permission?"

"She should have done so," was the reply. "I am in and out during the morning, however, and she might have been absent for a brief time without the fact being noticed."

Sheridan Keene took the Appleton street number, then bowed and arose to go, gravely acknowledging the information he had received.

He did not immediately report at head-

quarters. Though it then was nearly four o'clock, he again turned his steps in the direction of the clothing house of Horton & Hague. The junior partner happened to be in the salesroom, and at once accosted him.

"What now, Inspector Keene?" he cried, with a rather derisive smile. "Have you discovered anything new?"

"Nothing to the purpose," Keene replied, with a shake of his head. "This case is very mysterious, and I am constantly running against a wall."

"Much after the fashion of this morning, I presume," said Hague, with a sarcasm that told how deeply he had been cut by the bluff put up in his own interests.

"Oh, I admitted before I left here that I was wrong," rejoined Keene, with a curious look in his shrewd eyes. "We detectives are not always dead right, you know."

"I am quite aware of it," said Hague, tersely; then tauntingly added: "As a matter of fact, Inspector Keene, are you ever dead right?"

"Now and then, I imagine," said Keene, dryly. "Do you ever lunch at the Oriental Café?"

Hague started as if suddenly stung by a bee.

"Good gracious, Keene!" he cried, involuntarily. "Horton and I were at lunch there when we first discussed our miserable little project!"

"Is that so? I suspected as much, and came in to make sure! You see, Hague, we detectives are sometimes right!"

With which parting shot, very pointedly given, Sheridan Keene turned sharply on his heel and vanished out of the door.

CHAPTER VIII.

SPREADING THE NET.

"It is one thing to weave a network of evidence, Detective Keene, and another thing to secure the birds in it," said Chief Inspector Watts, along the latter part of that same afternoon, when he had received from Sheridan Keene a concise report of the detective's discoveries since morning.

"Suppose," he added; "that both George Dean and this Malcolm girl deny having had

any part whatever in this robbery, as no doubt they will, if arrested. We should still have the network of evidence, but it would be circumstantial only, and both the birds and the money we wish to recover may slip through the meshes."

"I admit that to be true, Chief Watts," said Keene, gravely; "yet I feel so sure that the evidence is reliable that it seems to me it should be turned to some account, even if the two are not immediately arrested."

"Oh, we will take advantage of it, never doubt that!" exclaimed the chief, with a significant smile. "I demur only to determine the best use to which it can be put. I have no doubt your deductions are correct."

"I am quite sure of it, chief. I suspected Dean from the moment he made sure to impress me with the fact that he twice had asked Hague to count the money; and I was doubly certain of his guilt when he rung a witness in on me without having been asked to do so. These were the acts of a man who deliberately had planned to avert suspicion, and who overshot the mark by taking too many precautions."

"I think you are right," nodded Chief Watts, thoughtfully, pacing the space between the desk and the closed door of his private office.

"Furthermore, he added; "that Dean consented at all to mark the package at less than its actual value indicates that he had some motive other than that of merely obliging Hague. An honest man, temporarily filling the position of another, would have been very careful to have consulted the cashier, to say the least. No, no; Dean certainly had some motive of his own."

"I think we shall discover what it was."

"No doubt of that, Sheridan Keene," said the chief, deeply. "I now can imagine several ways by which the missing money could have been abstracted, and the crime committed; but the actual method adopted is what we now are after, as well as the money itself. It is good to secure the criminals; it is better to secure both the criminals and their ill-gotten booty."

"True, chief."

"There is doubtless some understanding and pre-arranged plans between Dean and

this Malcolm girl," continued Chief Watts, resuming the chair at his desk.

"Oh, no doubt of it!"

"Possibly she overheard the project discussed by Horton and Hague in the café, and disclosed to Dean their intention to ship a package wrongly marked."

"That, too, is very probable, chief!" exclaimed Keene. "And he no doubt took advantage of the opportunity, and in some way succeeded in hoodwinking Hague, when he sealed the package."

"It was adroitly done, however it was accomplished."

"Evidently, since Hague was constantly watching him."

"Well, I have believed from the first that the money was abstracted at one end of the transaction or the other. The care with which the Adams Express Company transport their money-packages, and the perfect condition in which this one was received and delivered, convinced me that the theft had not been committed by any of the company's employees. I think, Detective Keene, we now had better try to net the criminals and recover what money they may have, and in a way that shall surely convict before alarming them."

"Have you formed any plan to that end?" inquired Keene, drawing his chair nearer to that of his clever superior.

"In part," bowed Chief Watts. "You say the Malcolm girl lives on Appleton street?"

"She has a room there."

"In a lodging-house, very likely."

"I imagine so."

"Doubtless she and Dean were acquainted before this crafty little job was pulled off."

"Surely, chief, since she must have known that Dean was employed in the Mutual National Bank, if our assumptions are correct."

"Yes, of course! Then Dean doubtless has been in the habit of calling on her. Do you think he now has any misgivings that you suspect him of the crime?"

"I'm not sure about that, chief," laughed Sheridan Keene. "I tried to stave them off; but he has a very curious eye, half crafty, and half sullen and defiant, and I found it difficult to read. He's not a safe man, or his face be-

lies him. If he found himself in a corner, and could escape by doing something desperate, I will wager he would take long chances. As a matter of fact, I did not fancy Mr. George Dean."

"I'll tell you what to do, Keene," said Chief Watts, abruptly. "You go up to the lodging-house on Appleton street, and see if you can engage and occupy a room there."

"My idea exactly, chief!" exclaimed Keene, with his eyes eagerly lighting.

"Keep your identity and mission concealed," continued Chief Watts; "and if you encounter Annie Malcolm, before she has seen Dean, you may let her think you merely the friend she met on the Fall River boat, and use your own judgment in handling her."

"I shall be discreet, chief," laughed Keene. "I have the money in view."

Chief Watts nodded approvingly.

"On the other hand," he added, earnestly; "if you do not encounter her at the outset, try by some artful inquiry to locate her room, and if possible secure one adjoining or near it."

"I understand."

"If you succeed in that, you had better lay in wait unobserved, and try to catch Dean and the girl in company, and secure some absolute evidence against them. If you want any help, wire down here and I will send you another man."

Keene shrugged his shoulders and smiled significantly.

"I think I can handle them alone, chief," he said, quietly.

"Go up there at once, then," replied Chief Watts. "If Dean apprehends any suspicions, he may visit the Malcolm girl to-night. It is now five o'clock, and you have no time to spare."

"Chief, I'll be in the house before half-past five!" laughed Sheridan Keene, springing to his feet and hurriedly departing.

Emerging to Pemberton square, the detective hailed a cab, and within half the time he himself had mentioned, he alighted less than a block away from the dwelling he was seeking.

It was one of a long brick block, of reputable appearance and in a tolerable neighbor-

hood. A placard was in one of the lower windows—"ROOMS TO LET."

Without delay Sheridan Keene mounted the stone steps and rang the bell. The summons was answered by a sedate woman of forty, or as near that as a woman's age can ever be determined by her looks; whose sombre face, and dress of unrelieved black, indicated that she had lost a good husband.

"I am looking for a room for a week or two, and in approaching I saw the sign in your window," Keene politely explained, in response to the woman's look of inquiry. "Have you any rooms vacant just now?"

"You are a stranger, sir," said the landlady, doubtfully regarding him.

"I can give you references, if you wish, madam; or I will pay each week in advance."

"Either will answer. Come in, sir."

"You have a room vacant, then?" said Keene, casting a quick glance over the hall and stairs.

"Two, sir; but one is on the upper floor."

"May I see both?"

"Certainly."

With never a smile breaking the mournful solemnity of her face, the woman led the way to the second floor, and opened the door of a back chamber. It looked out upon a rear yard, and the roof of a brick L, the latter over a kitchen.

"Are there any babies in the house, madam?" Keene asked, with a remarkable display of gravity.

"None, sir."

"Babies always disturb me, if they cry much," he explained.

"There are no babies or children in the house, sir," the landlady repeated, with unbroken melancholy.

"Are the lodgers inclined to be lively and very noisy?"

"Far from it, Mr. ——"

"Sheldon is my name, madam."

"Far from it, Mr. Sheldon. There are only three lodgers on this floor, and two above. The front room is occupied by a young married couple, both of whom work in a newspaper office nights, and sleep during the day."

"Ah, I see," bowed Keene, suppressing the smile in which he felt inclined to indulge.

"And the room next to this," continued the sober lady; "is occupied by a young lady named Malcolm, who is out a large part of the time. This is a quiet room, sir, if quietude is what you desire."

"Miss Malcolm does not play the piano and sing, does she?"

"She has no piano, sir, and I never heard her sing very much."

"The reason I make these inquiries, madam, is this," Sheridan Keene explained, subduing with difficulty his inclination to laugh. "I am a writer for one of the large New York publishing syndicates, and I spend most of my time at work in my room. Hence, noise of any kind has a tendency to disturb me."

"Which is very natural, Mr. Sheldon, I'm sure," admitted the sombre landlady, relaxing a little when Keene made, with his own aims in view, so plausible an explanation. "You may work in your room as much as you please, sir, and I'm quite sure you will not be seriously disturbed."

"Thanks for the assurance."

"The front lodgers are always asleep during the day, and Miss Malcolm is naturally a quiet girl and a good girl, though sometimes a little giddy. I am sure you will find the room sufficiently quiet."

Keene was too clever a detective not to take advantage of the woman's references to Annie Malcolm, and also too shrewd to betray himself by a display of unwarrantable interest. In a conventional way, merely, he quietly remarked:

"Perhaps Miss Malcolm, too, is out a part of the day. Does she work for a living?"

"Usually, sir, though she just now is out of a place," was the willing reply.

"I work quite a good deal evenings," observed Keene. "Does she have many visitors evenings?"

"Only occasionally, sir; but there never is any great noise in the room. I would not permit that."

"Thank you, Mrs. ——"

"Green, sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Green. I have no occasion for asking, other than that her room would be next to mine. Your saying she

was giddy led me to think she might have a good many gentlemen callers."

"Oh, I did not mean giddy in that way! Don't misunderstand me, I beg!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, now very favorably impressed by Keene's charming politeness.

"Annie is really a very good girl, and I take almost a mother's interest in her," she quickly added. "Her own parents are dead, and she had lodged with me for quite a long time. I did not mean giddy in the sense of being fast, I assure you. But Annie is a girl who enjoys a good time, and, of course, I have no right to restrain her, other than that of a friend and adviser."

"Certainly not," bowed Keene, producing a roll of bills. "I think I will engage the room, Mrs. Green, and will pay a week or two in advance, if that will be satisfactory."

"Quite so, Mr. Sheldon. One week will be sufficient."

"Thank you. I may have a small trunk of books and manuscripts sent up here to-morrow or the next day; and if you have no objection, I now will remain here. I am somewhat wearied by a journey from New York, and shall retire early."

"The room is all ready, sir, and you are quite at liberty to remain here."

Keene bowed, and gracefully smiled the woman of mournful mien from the room, and closed the door upon her sombre figure. That she was an estimable woman, and calculated to run a reputable house, he had not the slightest doubt.

The statements made about Annie Malcolm, however, rather surprised him. They presented the girl in a new light. Either Mrs. Green was egregiously deceived in her, or his own opinion of the girl and her conduct was seriously in error.

"It is barely possible that she has in some way been victimized by Dean, though I am blessed if I can quite fathom it," he said to himself, when considering the case in the solitude of his room a little later. "But I hope that I may find that to have been the fact."

He had in mind for the moment the pretty face of the girl he had seen on the Fall River boat, and he hoped the words of the landlady were true. He did not like to think of Annie

Malcolm behind prison bars; for Sheridan Keene had a tender spot in his strong, resolute heart, and the thought of arresting a young girl was always a painful one. But Keene was a man who, nevertheless, inflexibly cleaved to the requirements of duty.

It was nearly half-past six, and dusk was falling. In anticipation of subsequent needs, he opened the rear window and examined the facilities for gaining that of Annie Malcolm's room.

He found that, by clinging to the window casing, he could reach a heavy gutter at the break of the L, and gain the roof of the latter by a vigorous effort. The window of the girl's room opened directly upon this lower roof.

Yet there had been no indications up to this time that Annie Malcolm was in the house. Twice Keene had listened at the hall door, and once at the wall dividing her room from his; but only perfect silence had repaid his efforts, and he was forced to conclude that Annie Malcolm was still absent. Whether she would return during the evening, or whether Dean already had looked her up and, alarmed by the detective's interview, had sent her away, Keene could only conjecture. It might be, he decided, that Dean had felt his safety to lie in getting Annie Malcolm out of the way, a possibility which was favorable to the girl, and which Keene really hoped might be true.

In that Annie Malcolm might not return, however, his deductions were erroneous. Just after seven o'clock he heard the street door of the house closed, and immediately afterward the steps of some person ascending the stairs.

He had taken the precaution not to light the gas in his room, and the chamber was in total darkness. Stealing to the door, he opened it a crack and peered out into the hall, in which a lamp was burning.

His expectations were realized.

The person ascending the stairs was the girl he had seen and befriended on the Fall River boat—Annie Malcolm.

CHAPTER IX.

PLAYING THE SPY

Sheridan Keene closed and locked the door of his room, leaving the chamber still in darkness. His feelings were those of a man approaching some anxiously-awaited crisis, the outcome of which was to be of greater moment than the mere apprehending of a criminal, and the locating of a few thousands of dollars. If his face could have been seen, one would have noticed that his eyes were brighter and more intensely stern, and the lines of his fine features more set and hard.

Before he could take any decisive action, however, he heard the house-bell sharply ringing, and then the sound of a second step on the hall stairs. It now was the heavy tread of a man, who came directly up to the door of Annie Malcolm's chamber, and entered with only a sharp, impatient knock, to which no answer was awaited.

"Dean!" murmured the detective, under his breath. "He has been waiting outside for her return, yet she must have escaped his notice in time to prevent her entrance."

While he thus measured the probable situation, Sheridan Keene had not been idle. Moving with silence and caution, he had hurriedly raised the rear window, and now buttoned his coat closer around his muscular figure, and settled his hat firmly on his head.

It was dark outside, and the venture he now was about to make was extremely hazardous. The slightest miscalculation, or the trembling of a nerve or muscle, might result in a fall of twenty feet to the hard bricks of the area below.

Throwing one leg over the sill, Keene grasped the window casing and swung outside. Groping through the darkness, his extended foot presently located the gutter, and he set it firmly in the concave interior. Then he braced himself, caught his breath, and with a quick movement forced himself out and upward. For an instant he hung poised at a point of equilibrium, then dropped to his knees on the roof the L.

"Not so bad!" he murmured, yet with a keen sense of satisfaction and relief.

Before him was an illumined window, with the curtain down nearly to the lower sash.

Yet the space of an inch or so permitted the rays of the light from within to cast a bright line on the roof of the L, and gave to the detective the advantage of an insight to the chamber. He dropped on one knee and peered eagerly into the room.

Annie Malcolm, with out-door garments discarded, was seated on the edge of her bed; while standing in the floor, confronting her with an ominous frown on his dark face, was the suspected bank clerk, George Dean.

Keene whipped out his knife, inserting the blade under the sash of the window, which he cautiously raised a trifle. It enabled him to hear what was said in the room, and the first words were those of a bitter controversy.

"I was a fool to give you any money," Dean was saying, with semi-subdued disgust and resentment. "You have acted like a fool, like a colt turned loose. If you had stuck to your job for a time, and acted like a sensible being, there would have been no danger. What, in heaven's name, was your idea in rushing over to New York?"

"To have an innocent lark, of course. What else, indeed?" curtly retorted Annie Malcolm, with a toss of her head and a defiant wave of her hands. "What was your old money good for, if not to enjoy?"

"Do you realize where you stand?" demanded Dean, controlling only with an effort the conflicting fears and passion by which he was consumed. "Do you realize where you stand?"

"I am not standing!" cried Annie, with pert resentment of his tone and manner. "I am sitting!"

"And you next will be sitting in a prison cell, unless you listen to me!" cried Dean, forcibly taking the girl by the wrist and checking her levity. "If you had done as I commanded, there would have been no trouble; but now the officers of the law are after us."

Annie Malcolm turned very white, and started to her feet.

"Not after me?" she gasped, inquiringly, like one suddenly brought to her senses. "There are no officers after me!"

Dean vented a bitter laugh.

"You little fool!" he exclaimed, thrusting her to a chair. "Do you think you are not

in the same boat I am in, now that the deed is done?"

By slow degrees the last vestige of color left the cheeks of the girl, and for a moment she stared mutely at the harsh face of the speaker, as if there gradually was dawning on her mind some frightful possibility, of which as yet she had not dreamed.

"Not me—not after me!" she muttered, in accents of increasing dismay.

"After both of us," declared Dean, with cruel severity.

"But I—I stole nothing!"

"That makes no difference. You knew all about it, and put the scheme in my way. But for you, I should not have thought of it, and couldn't have accomplished it. In the sight of the law, you are as guilty as I am, and as liable to punishment. If you had followed my instructions, and kept your place and held your tongue, or told only what I told you to tell, there would have been no danger of discovery. As the thing now stands, I know well enough I am suspected, and some plan must be laid to avert exposure and arrest."

Tears were now rolling down Annie Malcolm's white face, and she was trembling with dismay and terror. Keene saw at a glance that whatever the girl had done, it had been done in partial ignorance and blindness, and under the influence of a designing and unprincipled man.

"Stop crying!" commanded Dean, sternly. "Stop crying, and listen to me! Possibly the case is not yet as desperate as I have pictured."

"Oh, oh, it is bad enough, if you speak the truth!"

"Stop crying, I say. When did you get home from New York?"

"Only this morning, George."

"Have you been at home all day?"

"No, no, I only just came in."

"Has a man been up here to see you?"

"What man?"

"Any man!" cried Dean, vehemently.

"No, no, none!"

"That's lucky, at least," said the scoundrel, with less austerity. "Now listen to me and I will tell what must be done."

"But I am guilty of nothing wrong, George Dean!" the girl now answered, with

feeling. "I only told you how the money was to be sent, and when. It was your own design; that of taking part of the money. I did nothing for which the officers should be seeking me."

"You came to the bank that morning, so as to see what occurred and to testify in my behalf, should it become necessary. That alone is enough to convict you."

"But you asked me to do that. Why did you not tell me at the time?"

"It don't matter what I did or didn't tell you," answered Dean, shortly. "It makes you as liable to the law as myself. Now, don't begin crying again. There is yet a way out of it, if you will listen to me and do as I say. If you don't, there will be but one end to it. We shall go to jail together."

"What am I to do?" asked Annie, wringing her hands with a dismay too poignant to be pictured with words.

"You must be calm, to begin with, and do what I told you," commanded Dean, who seemed to have a potent influence over the girl. "An officer may come here at any moment to question you. You must not be discovered in this state of confusion and distress."

"I can't help it! I——"

"You must help it!" persisted Dean, with greater austerity. "You are frightened before you are hurt, for I am but giving you warning in case one comes before we leave. You must stick boldly to the story I told you to tell, in case we are questioned; that we are chance acquaintances only, which is true; that you know nothing about this robbery, or the fact that Hague was going to send the money by express; that it was purely by chance you called at my window in the bank that morning to change a bill."

"Good heavens, Annie, a child could remember that, and stick to it! And that's all you need to do."

"But I never meant to commit any such crime," sobbed the girl. "You drove me to consenting to what you called your clever little scheme."

"And so it was a clever little scheme," cried Dean, with subdued vehemence. "And it may be all right even now, if you have any back-bone. Unless you are fool enough to

betray me, or weak enough to be driven into a corner, the officers cannot fix the crime upon me, if they go to the devil. It was too good a chance to lose. I am not always handling the money there, and seven thousand dollars are not to be gathered from every bush."

"Did you take such a sum as that?" gasped Annie Malcolm, staring up at him with awed and tearful eyes.

"Of course I did," growled Dean. "I had the package all prepared and sealed, ready for Hague when he should call that morning. It contained only five thousand dollars, the value you said he would ask me to mark on it. I had notes in it of the same denomination I was prepared to give him in exchange for that check. It was child's play. I had the bogus package handy under my blotter, and when he asked me to mark a fictitious value on the genuine package, I turned to my desk and did so. Then I turned blotter, package, and all, and gave him the one underneath, and left the genuine in its place. Faugh! that was a kid's sleight-of-hand."

The girl had ceased sobbing, but was trembling from head to foot. For the first time, the full magnitude of her transgression had been brought home to her; and by a knave as cruel and designing as the act itself was artful by which he accomplished the theft even under the very eyes of the man he had robbed.

Sheridan Keene was right when he said that George Dean was not a safe man to be at large.

"What am I to do?" moaned Annie Malcolm, for never did a friendless and unadvised girl find herself in a much more desperate strait. "Oh, oh, what am I to do?"

"Follow my instructions," said Dean, with persuasive austerity. "A confession of the truth will not help you. If you do what I command, we yet may escape detection, and ultimately divide the money."

"I don't want it! I won't have it!"

"Nevertheless, you will do what I bid you!" cried Dean, with terrible severity. "It's our only chance to escape a prison cell. I don't propose to be thrown down by you, now that I have the money. Not if I know it!"

More than the threatening manner of the man, which was the result of conscious desperation, the picture he drew of the imminent danger of arrest influenced the dismayed girl he had artfully victimized from the beginning. She looked up at him, still with awe and terror in her glistening eyes, and asked helplessly:

"What am I to do, then? What am I to do?"

"You must go away, farther than New York this time," explained the scoundrel, with unabated sternness, and with a look more than ever evil in his frowning dark eyes.

"Where must I go?"

"Anywhere you like. To Chicago, Denver, New Orleans, or to any other city, so that you put distance, and plenty of it, between yourself and Sheridan Keene."

Annie Malcolm started and caught her breath.

"I met a man on the New York boat named Sheridan," she exclaimed, involuntarily.

"Sheridan what?" gasped Dean, turning as pale as the girl.

"Only Sheridan. He said his last name was Sheridan."

"Describe him!"

"A tall, nice-looking young man, with smooth face and bright eyes. He befriended—"

"'Twas a lie!" cried Dean, hoarsely. "The man was Sheridan Keene, the detective. 'What did you say to him? Tell me what you said.'"

The subdued vehemence with which Dean was speaking was like that of a frenzy.

The glow in his eyes was that of utter desperation, and a desperation that would not shrink from anything that might serve to avert the downfall and dishonor he felt was threatening him. The emergency had arisen, which Sheridan Keene had said would only be required to turn George Dean from a gentleman to a ruffian.

For a moment the girl was terrified by his appearance, and held her breath, powerless to answer.

"I didn't say anything—nothing about us," she finally replied. "On my word, George, I did not."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, yes, I am sure! He did not know me; he only befriended me, when a man on the boat tried to make my acquaintance."

"Did he ask you anything about me, or the missing money, or——"

"Not a word; not a word! He left me at once, and I have not seen him since."

"If I thought you were lying——"

"I am not! George, I am not!"

Had he done as he felt, Sheridan Keene would have dashed through the window and throttled the scoundrel then and there.

Dean drew himself up and glanced toward the door.

"I am a fool to be so disturbed," he muttered, bitterly. "The danger is less than I fear. They have no proof—and shall have none! Listen to me, Annie! You now must do what I command."

"How can I?" cried the girl, herself driven to desperation by the man's display of passion and alarm. "I have no more money. I——"

"I will provide the money."

"What am I to do?"

"Leave Boston this very night," said Dean, forcibly. "I dare not let you remain here! I dare not trust to your courage and discretion, for you would be cornered and questioned by the police. You must evade that! You must give them the slip, and leave the city."

"Oh, this is terrible!" moaned the girl, again giving way to her tears.

"The chill of a prison cell is more so," cried Dean, with brutal severity. "You must do what I command. Go to Chicago, and hide yourself there. You can get a place to work, and remain there till this thing blows over. I will write you from here, and send you an address. And some day, when it is safe, I will join you."

"I don't want you to join me!" cried Annie Malcolm, with sudden passionate violence. "I hate you! I never wish to see you again! I will go—yes, I will go to-night! But if you ever join me—so help me, God, I will tell the whole truth, if I die for it!"

Had she known the world as the man knew it, that a confession might have saved her the very fate to which he had driven and still was driving her, she would not have spared

him for an instant. As it was, Dean turned livid to the lips, and shrank from the fire blazing in her eyes.

"Be that as it may," he said, with an oath; "you must go, and shall go!"

"I have said I would go!"

"How soon can you get ready?"

"In half an hour."

"That will be in time for the west-bound train," said Dean, hoarsely. "Meet me at the old place, then, in half an hour, and we will walk to the station. Meantime, I will go and get the money. I will give you all you will need, and ten times more."

"Why not now?"

"I haven't it with me. Do you think I am fool enough to carry seven thousand dollars in my pocket at a time like this? I will bring you one thousand dollars when I meet you."

Mere mention of the sum dazed the girl, if, indeed, she was not already dazed by the fears Dean had aroused.

"Go, then!" she cried, with desperate impatience. "I will meet you there in half an hour."

"Sure?"

"Sure!"

"Without a word to any one here, mind you," the miscreant forcibly added.

She could not read the look in his dreadful eyes, as Sheridan Keene read it at that moment. It was that of a man ready to do even greater crime to shield himself; and by the very precautions he now was taking, he aimed to rear a barrier against subsequent perils.

"I will not say a word to any one," Annie Malcolm hastened to reply.

"Be sure of that!"

"I will be sure."

"Have you told any one that you expected me here to-night?"

"No, no one!"

"In half an hour, then," cried Dean, turning to seize the knob of the door.

Again the girl looked him in the face, and again she failed to read it.

"I will meet you at the end of the half-hour," she said, simply.

Dean turned without another word, and hastened from the room and from the house.

Sheridan Keene could not regain his own room in time to follow the knave.

He did the next best thing, however.

He waited until Annie Malcolm had prepared herself for her journey, and had stolen forth from her room. Then Keene threw open her window, and followed the girl.

CHAPTER X.

DESPERATION'S DIRE RESORT.

They met on the Dartmouth street bridge a half-hour later. Annie Malcolm carried only a single piece of luggage, the same she had brought from New York that very morning.

George Dean was now in a top-coat, with the collar turned high about his ears, while a soft felt hat was drawn low over his heavy dark brows. But little more than half of his villainous face was exposed.

"It will be safer if we don't walk to the station in company, Annie," he said, the moment she approached him, for he had been the first to reach the rendezvous.

"Why so?" Annie Malcolm asked, in surprise.

"Because we may be seen," Dean replied, with some asperity. "Don't you understand that we are in a deucedly desperate situation? Do you imagine I am sending you out to Chicago merely for the amusement of the thing?"

"But I am not known to the police!" exclaimed the girl.

"You are likely to be, if you are not," retorted the scoundrel, with a bitter laugh. "You do what I tell you! In that lies your only hope."

"Say it, then!"

"Give me your luggage. I will carry it for you, and go on ahead. Follow me at a little distance, and don't lose sight of me if we get into a crowd. You must surely hit the midnight train."

"It is not near midnight yet; but I will not miss you. Go on!"

"Wait a bit," Dean paused to add. "I shall not go straight to the station, because it is too early and we must not be seen hanging about there. You follow me until you see me

stop, then come and join me again. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I tell you I will not miss you. Go on ahead!"

Annie Malcolm was trembling violently, but she was yielding blindly to the apprehensions this man had aroused, and that far greater fear of prison cell than of him. She gave him the small portmanteau she had packed for her flight, and waited till he was some twenty feet away, then obediently followed him.

Sheridan Keene still followed the girl.

He could have arrested them then and there, but he was now actuated by another motive. He wished to discover if he had read George Dean aright. He wanted to know of just how vicious a crime this fellow was capable, under such desperate circumstances. He had resolved to send him to prison with a long and deserved sentence, should he secure sufficient evidence of his vicious nature to promote that desirable end.

Still, with his face partly concealed, and his head bowed to avoid the possibility of recognition of passers-by, George Dean led the way in the direction of the Southern Union station. He walked moderately, that Annie Malcolm might have no difficulty in keeping him in view and following him; and he took those streets in which the gloom was deepest, and a meeting with pedestrians least liable.

He did not go direct to the station. He turned down Atlantic avenue, and crossed to that side adjoining the water front, maintaining his moderate pace until he arrived at an opening between two gloomy buildings. A glance through the obscure passageway revealed the very locality for which he had been seeking. The passage gave egress to one of the short piers in that locality, with the waters of the harbor lapping the piles beneath.

Dean halted at the corner of one of these buildings and drew into the shadow of the wall, out of the range of the rays of the electric lights on the avenue.

In obedience to his earlier instructions, Annie Malcolm now approached and rejoined him.

"Why have you come down here so far, George Dean?" she asked, in rather timid tones.

"To avoid observation," he replied, drawing her also into the shadow of the building.

"But there are not many people along here," she protested.

"One person is enough, so be it we are seen together and either of us is recognized," replied Dean, in tones which now were much more gentle and composed.

"I suppose that is true," the girl admitted.

"It is not yet time for the train, not for two hours," Dean further explained. "It won't do for us to be seen standing about, so I kept walking till I found a spot where we can talk unobserved."

"Why did you start so early, then?"

"For fear an officer might have called at the Appleton street house, of course."

"I had forgotten that," said Annie, confused by the very nature of the experience she was undergoing.

"You'd forget that you are on earth if I didn't tell you of it," Dean dryly rejoined, with a short laugh. "I will go to the station and get your ticket for you by and by. I will buy you a sleeper through to Chicago, and you can travel in style. Nobody will ever suspect you."

"God forbid! I should wilt like a rag."

Dean now had no doubt of that, despite that he at first had some faith in the girl's nerve and reliability. But he did not express his belief nor betray any feeling. He felt he now knew a surer method of preventing Annie Malcolm from betraying him, and, with gentle persuasion and less display of anxiety he now was paving the way to accomplish it.

"I also wish to give you the money—the one thousand dollars," he continued, fingering his pocket. "But we must get off the street. It will not do to be seen. Let's slip through the passage here and sit down on one of the boxes on the wharf."

"Oh! but it's dark down there!" the girl apprehensively exclaimed.

"Darkness will not harm you, however, as much as discovery and arrest," returned Dean. "Come! come! No one will see us down there."

"I am afraid!"

"Folly! Besides, I wish to tell you what to do when you arrive in Chicago, and where to

go. We cannot talk here. An officer may walk by at any moment. There is no one out yonder, and we shall not be seen."

Though the girl was trembling, it was with fear of the darkness and the lonely locality, not fear of the man. That he would do her bodily harm; that he would take her life, even, in a desperate attempt to hide his own downfall and disgrace, did not once enter Annie Malcolm's head. Dean took up the portmanteau he briefly had set down, and the girl suffered him to take her arm and lead her down between the buildings.

"Don't shiver so," he said, gently.

"I can't help it."

"Nonsense! There is no danger of discovery here."

"Well, I am afraid."

"Of what, indeed?"

"I don't know—yet I am afraid!"

It was that fear which instinctively comes to one who so is threatened, yet who does not suspect so heinous a crime, so frightful a fate.

"Nonsense!" Dean again repeated, not unkindly. "See, it is lighter out here on the pier, and the place is deserted. We can talk out here to our hearts' content and not be seen or heard. When you arrive in Chicago——"

"Don't go down here any farther, George!"

"Just out to the cases yonder. We can find one on which to sit."

Again the girl yielded.

The place was, indeed, deserted—save by them, and by one crouching figure now hugging the building they had left behind; the figure of a man with coat buttoned tight around him, and with a fire like that of fury scarce suppressed blazing in eyes.

And it was indeed dark and lonely out there. Only the stars lighted the deserted pier. The wind from the harbor swept across it. The dark water ebbed and flowed beneath it, lapping the piles with incessant, mournful sound. Across the calm bay were the lights of other precincts of the city, with the tall masts of the shipping intervening, with the swinging signal lanterns from bow and mainstays.

Still Dean led the girl farther down upon the pier and nearer the cases mentioned. Thrice he glanced furtively in all directions,

and thrice he assured himself that they were indeed alone, and that the crime he contemplated could be committed unobserved.

"When you get to Chicago," he repeated, "you must first look up lodgings in some quiet neighborhood and secure a room."

"Of course, I must do that," returned the girl. "I must sleep somewhere."

"But I should advise you to get a room in a quiet locality, where you will not be likely to be much observed."

"I will get it where I like!"

"I am telling you this for your own good," argued Dean, edging nearer the break of the pier. "I am looking out for you as well as for myself, Annie."

"You ought to have done that earlier," retorted the girl. "Don't go so near the edge."

"Pshaw! There is no danger. I——"

"But I will go no farther!" Annie Malcolm exclaimed. "If you have anything you want to say to me, say it here and now!"

"You know I have always meant well by you, Annie," replied Dean, "and I mean well now."

While speaking he set down the portmanteau just behind the girl, and once more cast a swift glance in every direction; but the pile of cases and boxes now hid the figure which had been crouching in the shadow of the building.

Then Dean arose erect, close behind the girl, even while he spoke the lie last recorded. The break of the pier was less than ten feet away.

With features deathly pale under his awful determination, with eyes pale and teeth set, Dean seized the girl from behind, and, with a quick movement, clapped his hand over her mouth and wound one arm around her neck.

Like a flash the awful truth then came home to her—that he meant to choke her, drown her, remove her from his path as he might have disposed of a snake or any other venomous reptile.

Every ounce of strength suddenly left her, only to return as suddenly under the frenzy of her terror, and her fear led to a momentary struggle too terrible to picture.

Except one man alone, no power on earth could have saved the girl that dreadful night.

But a figure came out of the darkness with

a bound like that of a leopard. Only a single blow was struck, or, rather, two!—the second when George Dean struck the floor of the pier.

Then the figure bent above him for an instant, and the sharp click of closing manacles sounded on the night air.

It was a mute conflict from the beginning, but now Sheridan Keene jerked Dean to his feet, dazed and bewildered for a moment by the blow he had received.

"So, so, my fine fellow!" the detective cried. "You would have done murder, also, would you? Well, well, we'll see what sort of an ending we can make of you!"

"Good heavens!—it's Sheridan Keene!" gasped Dean, as white as death itself. Then he suddenly stared down like one confused at the handcuffs circling his wrists.

Annie Malcolm had stood mute and powerless to move during the brief episode. Now she sprang nearer, with dilated eyes, and cried, with sudden sobs and tears:

"Oh, oh, Mr. Sheridan!"

"Sheridan Keene, instead," interrupted the detective.

"You have befriended me again. You have saved me from——"

"From one who would have done you much greater harm than the other, my girl," Keene again interposed, curtly. "Come! come! You both must go with me. But I will yet save you, my girl, once more—from the fate this miscreant merits and shall surely receive! Come, now, both of you!"

Not once did he loose his hand from the shoulder of George Dean, who stood like a man crushed by the fate befallen him; and as Sheridan Keene led him back through the gloom of the pier, with the weeping girl following behind, the shrill call of the detective's whistle for the patrol fell with startling abruptness on the soft night air.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

Before another hour had passed George Dean and Annie Malcolm were lodged in the Tombs.

From the moment of his arrest Dean went to pieces, and but little questioning was re-

quired to evoke a full confession as to how the robbery had been effected and precisely what part Annie Malcolm had had in the crime, nearly all of which has already been so clearly presented as to need no repetition.

Only a small portion of the stolen money had been spent, moreover, and the balance was quickly secured and restored to its owners. The loss they sustained, however, rather served them right, and, perhaps, taught them that it is wiser to pay nominal express charges than to lay themselves liable to artful thefts and the expenses which accrue for the service of professional detectives.

As Sheridan Keene had inferred during his talk with Mrs. Green in his lodging-house, the Malcolm girl had in reality been more sinned against than sinning.

Her relations with Dean had been those of girlish friendship only, resulting from an acquaintance formed at times when he lunched at the Oriental Café. She had told Dean what she had overheard between Horton and Hague, and the bank clerk, deceiving her as to the magnitude of his contemplated theft, had taken advantage of the curious circumstances, as described.

The robbery having been committed, Dean then had purchased the girl's silence with a generous sum of money, still concealing just what he had done; and Annie Malcolm, with her head turned by the gift, had instantly thrown up her situation, and set out for New

York to visit a cousin and to enjoy what she was pleased to term an innocent lark.

George Dean received a sentence of four years for his part in the crime, and is still in the State prison.

But Sheridan Keene was as good as his word, and did what he could to spare Annie Malcolm a similar punishment. Through his own efforts and the kind intercession of Chief Inspector Watts, to whom all the facts strongly appealed, the district attorney was prevailed upon to *nol. pros.* the case against the girl, and the court released her upon probation.

That the tearful gratitude with which she acknowledged the kindly interest of Sheridan Keene and the chief inspector was deep and genuine has since been proved by the exemplary conduct of the misguided girl, who now is daily seen again at her table in the Oriental Café.

When Hague now sees Detective Keene approaching on the street he crosses to the opposite side. He doesn't like to be "guyed."

THE END.

Next week's SHIELD WEEKLY (No. 8) will contain the strange story of a celebrated pawnshop case, in which Detective Keene himself is accused of being implicated in the crime. This absorbing story is entitled, "A Lion Among Wolves; or, Sheridan Keene's Identity."

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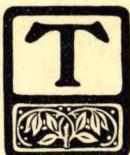
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